

Overview & Reflective Input

9th SALGA National Communicators' Forum (NCF9)

Programme Director, Ms Thami Ngubeni,
Deputy Minister of Cooperative Governance Dr Namane Dickson Masemola,
Deputy Minister in the Presidency, Kenny Morolong,
SALGA Deputy President: Cllr Xola Pakati
SALGA Western Cape Provincial Chairperson Alderman Donovan Joubert,
NEC Members in attendance
Leadership of SALGA, CoGTA and the GCIS,
Municipal Communicators,
Colleagues and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Purpose and Intent of the NCF

The National Communicators' Forum was established to strengthen municipal communication practice, create a dedicated platform for peer learning, and enhance the profession's contribution to improving local government communication. It provides space for municipal communicators to engage on sector challenges, share innovations, and collectively build coherent, credible communication systems for municipalities.

2. Nine Years of Collaboration and Knowledge-Building

Over the years, the NCF has evolved into a strategic platform for strengthening municipal communication, shaping a consistent agenda focused on empowering communicators, improving public confidence and modernising how municipalities engage their communities. A review of the past NCF themes reflects a clear and steady progression, anchored by several recurring priorities:

- Capacity building and professionalisation of municipal communicators — a theme present since the inaugural NCF and re-emphasised annually.
- Citizen-centred communication, ensuring communities are informed, heard and treated as active partners rather than passive observers.
- Crisis and risk communication, with a continued call for preparedness, transparency and rapid response mechanisms.
- Digital transformation, including the adoption of social media, AI, data analytics and modern communication tools.
- Strengthened intergovernmental collaboration, particularly through the tripartite structure of SALGA, GCIS and CoGTA.
- Reputation management, storytelling and promoting balanced narratives that highlight both challenges and municipal successes.

These recurring themes illustrate a sector consistently working to move local government communication forward, year after year.

Last year's NCF8 deepened this trajectory by elevating several emerging issues: the need for evidence-based communication, expanded use of media monitoring, tailored community segmentation, greater visibility across platforms, and a sharper focus on climate communication and debt recovery messaging. The emphasis on professional development, media readiness, digital engagement, and multi-channel storytelling continues to shape a more capable and responsive communication function across municipalities.

3. The Current Communication Environment

Municipal communicators operate in a highly complex and rapidly shifting information landscape shaped by:

- The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, which alters how communities interpret local government work.
- A fast-moving digital ecosystem that demands speed, accuracy and clarity.
- Increasing community expectations for transparency, accessibility and timely communication.
- Greater scrutiny of local government performance during service delivery pressures, disasters, and moments of high public interest.

These conditions have intensified the professional demands on communication teams, requiring stronger technical capability, improved collaboration, and more proactive communication planning.

4. Reflecting on the Forum's Role in This Era

NCF9 offers an opportunity to pause and reflect on how far the communications sector has come, and where it must go next. The Forum's evolution reflects a clear trajectory:

- It is no longer merely an annual event; it has become a sector-wide capability-building platform.
- It has encouraged municipalities to adopt more structured communication practices, align to national communication policies, and strengthen internal communication systems.
- It serves as a safe, practitioner-led space for honest dialogue about communication gaps, bottlenecks, innovations and the realities of municipal communication.

The post-truth environment makes this Forum even more essential. It reinforces the need for communicators to anchor their work in accuracy, transparency, ethical practice and citizen connection, ensuring credibility in a time where information can easily be distorted.

5. Focus of NCF9

This year's theme: “**Elevate: Reclaiming Trust, Credibility and Citizen Connection in Local Government Communication**” positions the Forum as a moment to consolidate learning and elevate practice.

NCF9 aims to:

- Reposition communicators as strategic governance partners.
- Strengthen credibility, ethics and professionalism in municipal communication.
- Improve citizen engagement approaches.
- Build coordinated, aligned and consistent municipal messaging.
- Institutionalise SALGA Elevate at municipal level.

Strategic Design:

NCF 9 is intentionally structured as a strategic journey across three phases:

- Day 1- Resetting Credibility & Strategic Purpose

Focus: Leadership, trust and narrative alignment.

- Day 2 - Building Professional Practice & Performance

Focus: Policy, media capability, data-driven storytelling and applied learning.

- Day 3 - Embedding Resilience, Democratic Integrity & Commitment

Focus: Crisis readiness, political complexity, internal trust and Elevate commitments.

6. Closing Reflection

As we mark the ninth iteration of the Forum, the key reflection is this: Municipal communication has matured into a strategic capability that underpins accountability, service delivery visibility, and citizen participation.

NCF9 is therefore both a celebration of progress and a recommitment to continuous improvement and innovation in municipal communications practice.

We hope the programme and proceedings meet your expectations.

Thank you.